

Stencil House
Clifton vicinity
Wayne County
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-190

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

CLIFTON
11-1973

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

STENCIL HOUSE

HABS No. TN-190

Location: Clifton vicinity, Wayne County, Tennessee.

Present Owner: Mrs. Herman Morris.

Present Occupants: Mr. and Mrs. Everett Stallings.

Present Use: Residence.

Significance: This small wood farmhouse is noteworthy for its extant stencil work on the interior.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1830.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following chain of title applies to that portion of the farm, owned in 1975 by Mrs. Herman Morris, upon which the Stencil House and its dependencies are located.
 - 1825 Grants February 12, 1825 recorded February 12, 1825 in Tennessee General Grant Book Z pages 534-7 (2000 acres on Camp Creek) State of Tennessee to Collin Campbell
 - 1830 Deed November 2, 1830 recorded March 24, 1831 in Book A page 434 (183 acres 44 poles) Collin Campbell of Maury County to Isaac Tarkinton
 - 1830 Deed November 2, 1830 recorded November 6, 1830 in Book A page 424 Isaac Tarkinton to John W. Nunnely

No transfer by deed or will is found from John W. Nunnely or his heirs; nor is there recorded any conveyance to the next documented owner, Nathaniel F. Johnson. It is believed that Johnson's wife was Nunnely's daughter; a Mary N. Johnson bought slaves from James Warr, whose land adjoined this tract on the north (Deed Book H page 356).

- 1868 Will November 8, 1867 recorded February 3, 1868 in
Book 1867-77 page 1
Nathaniel F. Johnson
to
Nancy Isabella Johnson (daughter of Nathaniel, later Mrs.
Rhone Dillon)
- 1919 Deed April 14, 1919 recorded December 28, 1920 in
Book 11 page 272
Lillian Dillon, et al (heirs of Rhone Dillon)
to
Will Dillon (their brother)
- 1975 Mrs. Herman Morris, the present owner, is
Will Dillon's daughter.

4. Alterations and additions: The basic structure was a weatherboarded log dogtrot house with chimneys at the east and west ends and a porch across the north elevation. At some point in the mid-nineteenth century the western third of this porch was made into a room and a chimney was built to serve it. Early in the twentieth century both chimneys on the west side were removed, and their materials (stone and brick) used to construct a vegetable cellar southwest of the house. The present chimney on the west end is a twentieth century feature, as are the kitchen and shed additions on the south elevation.

- B. Historical Context: The Stencil House was almost certainly built for John W. Nunnely; the first owner lived in Maury County, and the second only owned the land one day. It is notable primarily for its stenciled interior, apparently the work of Moses Eaton, Jr. of Dublin, New Hampshire. According to Waring (Early American Stencils, pp. 56-7), this well-known itinerant painter did make a tour to "the West." Houses in Ohio and Indiana have also been attributed to him as decorator. Eaton was born in 1796; his death date is not recorded. A Levi Eaton was a neighbor of the Nunnely family, but no relationship to Moses has been established.

If the assumption is correct that the daughter of John W. Nunnely was the wife of Nathaniel F. Johnson, this house has remained in one family since it was built.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A wood farmhouse with a dogtrot plan, built before the Civil War.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor. The house is deteriorating on the exterior although the interior is in fairly good shape.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The original building measured 20' north to south x 48' east to west. (The main facade faces north). It is one story high with attic.
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Walls: The original portions of the house are of log (9-1/2" x 13"). The exterior walls are covered with wood siding having 4 3/4" to the weather. Room additions are of frame.
4. Chimneys: There is a stepped brick chimney on the east end. It measures 2'-0" x 6'-6" at the base and 2'-0" x 3'-0" at the top. The west chimney is 20" square.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The original entry doorways contained 31" wide double doors on the north and south sides. They were six-panel doors. The north door has a five light transom over. The original cross bar lock is still in place.
 - b. Windows: There are wood double hung windows with wood sash having various numbers of lights. Those on the north are 9/6 and 6/9. Those on the east are 4/4. It appears that the windows were once shuttered.
6. Roof: The roof is gabled with the ridge running east to west. Its surface is of raised seam sheet metal. The roof slopes change to accommodate the room additions to the north and south. There is a box cornice with board soffit and fascia having a simple molding.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The original plan had a central hall (9'-9" x 18'-0") with one room on either end (east and west) which measured about 18' square. The attic had a similar plan but did not attain full ceiling height. Frame additions extend the plan north and south.

Ceiling height: First floor, 8'-8"; attic, 6'-4".

2. Stairways: The main stairway is located in the central hall. It has twelve risers to a landing with three additional risers to the attic level. The risers are 7-1/4" with 10-1/2" x 2'-10" treads. The stringers and stair soffit have stencil work. A simple square newel and balusters support a round headed, flat bottom handrail. A stairway in the parlor has fourteen risers in a dog-leg to the right.
3. Flooring: 6" to 8" boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls have 7" horizontal boards. In the parlor there is a 2'-9-1/2" high wainscot of horizontal boards. The ceilings are the wood underside of the floors with exposed 2-1/2" x 7" and 9" joists which have beaded corners. The walls are covered with stencil work.
5. Decorative features and trim: The painted stencil work is still extant and in very good condition with original paint, although covered with soot and grime of the years.

The fireplaces in the first floor rooms have wood mantels with 5'-7" high mantel shelves.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The farmhouse is situated on a large farm in a rural setting. The main facade faces north. There are a few other run-down outbuildings on the immediate site. The house is set several hundred feet back from the gravel road.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Interview: Dillon, Patty (Mrs. Will). Interviewed March 12, 1972 in Wayne County Nursing Home, Waynesboro, Tennessee. She had information about the family tree, location of graves, and original function of outbuildings. This informant is now deceased.

B. Bibliography:

1. Secondary and published sources:

Klein, Rosemary L. "Rooms of Stenciled Splendor," American Home (August, 1972), pp. 44-5.

Little, Nina Fletcher. American Decorative Wall Painting, 1700-1850 (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1972), pp. 99-106, 145-7, 153-4.

"Moses Eaton," New Hampshire Profiles (Jan. 1973).

Waring, Janet. Early American Stencils on Walls and Furniture (Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1968), pp. 23-6, 56-62, 78-9; figs. 18, 58-60, 89-90.

C. Other Information:

A kit which belonged to Moses Eaton, Jr. contains stencils for most, if not all, of the designs used in the Stencil House. This kit is preserved in the library of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Boston.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This 1972 project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed by Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona), project supervisor, and Richard H. Hulan, project historian (Nashville), with architects James D. Skelton (University of Illinois) and Mark D. Frederickson (University of Arizona) and student architects Darrell K. Pattison (University of Cincinnati) and John P. Vergos (University of Tennessee) at the Memphis, Tennessee field office on the campus of Memphis State University.

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The written data was prepared for Summer 1985 transmittal to the Library of Congress by Susan McCown, HABS Architectural Historian in the Washington, D.C. office.

Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, took the photographs of the Stencil House in March 1974.

ADDENDUM TO
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